IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH SCHEMA ACTIVATION STRATEGY

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to improvethe students' reading comprehension through schema activation strategy. The population of this research was the first grade students of SMA Negeri 4 Palu. A true experimental design and random sampling technique were used. As the result, Class X D and X E were selected as the sample of this study. Class X D of 32 students was chosen as the control group while the experimental group was class X E of 36 students. The data were collected through observation and tests; pre and post test. Observation was conducted to get information about the teaching-learning process. When doing the observation, the researcher found that the English teacher did not use Schema Activation Strategy in teaching reading skill. After giving pre and post-test, the data were analyzed statistically. It is found that the result of t-counted was 2.853. By applying the degree of freedom (df) 66 (36+32-2), and level of significance 0.05, the value of t-table was 1.998. It can be said that the value of t-counted was higher than t-table. In conclusion, the use of Schema Activation Strategy can significantly improve the students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: Improving, Reading Comprehension, Schema Activation Strategy

INTRODUCTION

In language learning, reading is one of the language skills that have to be mastered by the students. It is taught in integration with three other skills; listening, speaking, and writing (KTSP SMA, 2006). The teaching of reading is very important because it helps the students to have more skills in comprehending and interpreting the content of an English text. Reading skill has been introduced to the students of secondary school. The aim of teaching reading in this level is to enable the students to understand and comprehend a short English text as stated in KTSP (2006:311), "Siswa diharapkan mampu memahami makna teks tulis fungsional pendek dan esei sederhana berbentuk *recount, narrative* dan *procedure* dalam konteks kehidupan sehari-hari dan untuk mengaksesilmu pengetahuan".

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Nowadays, in the teaching reading, the students face some problems. Firstly, for most students, reading an English text or passage is a very difficult activity and is considered to raise lots of problems for them. Secondly, when they are asked to read an English text, a number of students directly open their dictionary to find out the meaning of words they do not know yet. In contrast, the students who do not have any dictionary will do nothing with the text. Thirdly, lots of students are still lack of skill in finding the main idea of a reading text. Therefore, the teachers need to improve their ways or techniques in helping the students to solve such problems.

Based on the preliminary observation to the first grade students of SMA Negeri 4 Palu, it was found that the students were lack of skill in comprehending an English text. They were not able to find out the main idea of a paragraph or text. Also, the students were passive and irresponsive in learning English. In line with this situation, the English teachers need to apply an appropriate technique in teaching reading. One of the effective ways is by using Schema Activation Strategy.

Schema refers to the knowledge already stored in someone's memory (plural: schemata). Schema activation strategy is a way of reading where the readers are expected to use a strategy to activate his/her own prior knowledge when they read an English text or passage. Khemlani and Lynne (2000) assert that the role of the reader and the knowledge s/he brings to bear on the text draw a great importance in the reading process. Readers are expected to be accustomed with the text they read before they are going to understand and comprehend it.

Mohammadi and Abidin (2011) divide schema into three types. The first type is linguistic schema. It refers to the knowledge of the letters and their corresponding sounds, and the ability to predict, through knowledge of syntax, the word or words that will follow. It is the base for other schemata and extremely important to decode and understand while reading. The second type is formal schema. It refers to the knowledge of rhetorical patterns and the organizational forms in which the information in the text is written. The speed at which the reader processes the text is influenced by the familiarity with text structures. The last type is content schema. It is the reader's background knowledge of the topic being read and familiarity of the topic from previous experience, or whether it is related to socio-cultural settings of the reader. Readers with higher background knowledge can comprehend and remember the text much better.

Ajideh (2006) argues that the best time to activate schemata is in the pre-reading stage of reading. It is supported by Zhang (1993:5) explaining, "Comprehension is

facilitated by explicitly introducing schemata through pre-reading activities". Thus the pre-reading stage helps in activating the relevant schema. Most teachers tend to neglect this stage because they claim that there is not enough time. In fact, pre-reading activities motivate the students before the actual reading takes place (Chastain, 2003). Moreover, Ringler and Weber (1984) believe that pre-reading activities elicit prior knowledge, provide background, and focus attention.

One of the schema activation strategies which can be used in pre-reading stage is KWL chart. The term KWL stands for *what I **K**now, what I **W**ant to find out, and what I have **L**earnt*. Ogle (1986) mentions that KWL chart is especially helpful as a pre-reading strategy when reading text and may also serve as an assessment of what students have learned during a unit of study. She further argues that KWL can help students to be active thinkers while reading because they have specific things to look for and reflect on what they learned when they are finished reading.

Reading comprehension is generally known as an interactive mental process between a reader's linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the world, and knowledge about a given topic (Mohammadi and Abidin, 2011). In general, there are four levels of reading comprehension. The first level is literal comprehension. It asks the students to find out the answers in the text itself because they are explicitly stated in the text. It is the simplest level comprehension and makes the least demands on reasoning (Harris and Sipay, 1980). The second level is inferential comprehension. It focuses on reaching conclusion or drawing inferences from what is read since the answers are not clearly stated in the text or implicitly. The third level is critical reading which involves evaluation, the making of a personal judgment on the accuracy, value and truthfulness of what is read. It concerns with how to analyze or gather the information of the text. The last level is creative reading. It is the highest level of reading comprehension which leads the students to think beyond the truth and look for alternate ways to solve problems. It uses divergent rather than convergent thinking skills.

In relation to the problem described above, this study was aimed at improving students' reading comprehension through schema activation strategy. In line with the levels of reading comprehension above, writer wanted to apply KWL chart as a schema activation strategy in teaching literal and inferential comprehension. The writer believed that activating prior knowledge before reading would familiarize the students with the text, so it would be easy for them to understand and comprehend it.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher applied true-experimental research design. The sample consisted of two groups; experimental and control group. The writer gave pre test and post test to both groups, but treatment was applied only to the experimental group. Then control group was taught by using the conventional teaching. The formula used in this research could be seen as follows (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006):

Pre test	Treatment	Post test
O1	X	O2
O3		O4

Where:
O1, O3 = pretest
X = treatment
O2, O4 = posttest

The population of this research was the first grade students of SMA Negeri 4 Palu which consisted of eleven parallel classes. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119) define a population as "a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research". The total numbers of the population were 405 students. The researcher used random sampling technique to select the sample of this research. As the result, class X E was chosen as the experimental group while class X D as the control group.

In this study, the researcher involved two kinds of variables; they were independent and dependent variable. The independent variable of the research was the schema activation strategy while the dependent variable was the students' reading comprehension.

The researcher used two kinds of research instruments to collect the data, they were observation and tests. She used the observation to get information about how the teaching-learning process was taking place in the classroom. Then the testswere used to examine their ability in comprehending an English text before and after treatment..

Before conducting the treatment, the researcher administered a pre-test to measure their ability in comprehending an English text. The pre-test was a passage about 300 words long and followed by twenty questions. They were in the form of true/false items, and essay. The writer asked the students to read the passage. Next, they were asked to answer the question based on the text. The students had to do this test individually. The scoring system was presented in the following table:

Table 1:
Scoring system

No	Types of test	Number of test	Score per item	Total score
1.	True/false items	10 items	1	10
2.	Essay	10 items	3	30
	Total	20 items		40

After giving the pre-test, the researcher conducted the treatment in eight meetings. In every meeting, she used communicative approach where the students should be active and give response to the material given. Therefore she divided the students into some small groups.

In order to assess the progress of the students' reading comprehensionafter the treatment, the researcher gave post-test at the last meeting. The post-test was designed in the same form as the pre-test.

Next, the researcher used the formula proposed by Arikunto (2010) in order to determine the individual standard scores.

$$\Sigma = \frac{X}{N} x\, 100$$

Where:
Σ = individual score
X = obtained score
N = maximum score
100 = constant score

The formula used by the writer in counting the mean scores in both experimental and control group was quoted from Gay (1996:528),

$$\overline{X}_1 = \frac{\Sigma X_1}{n_1}$$

$$\overline{X}_2 = \frac{\Sigma X_2}{n_2}$$

Where:
$\overline{X}_1$ = mean of scores in experimental group
$\overline{X}_2$ = mean of scores in control group
ΣX_1 = sum of scores in experimental group
ΣX_2 = sum of scores in control group
n_1 = number of scores in experimental group
n_2 = number of scores in control group

After counting the mean score for both groups, the researcher computed the sum of squares for each group. Gay (1996:531) provided the formula as follows:

$$SS_1 = \sum X_1^2 - \frac{(\sum X_1)^2}{n_1}$$
$$SS_2 = \sum X_2^2 - \frac{(\sum X_2)^2}{n_2}$$

Where:
SS_1 = sum of squares in experimental group
SS_2 = sum of squares in control group
ΣX_1^2 = sum of squared scores in experimental group
ΣX_2^2 = sum of squared scores in control group

Finally, in order to know the significance difference between the experimental and control group, the writer computed t-counted by using t-count formula as taken from Gay (1996:486) as follows:

$$t = \frac{\overline{X_1} - \overline{X_2}}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

Where:
t = volume of t-counted
$\overline{X_1}$ = mean of scores in experimental group
$\overline{X_2}$ = mean of scores in control group
SS_1 = sum of squares in experimental group
SS_2 = sum of squares in control group
n_1 = number of scores in experimental group
n_2 = number of scores in control group

FINDINGS

The data of this research were analyzeddescriptively and statistically. The researcher used descriptive analysis to describe the result of the observation while the data from pre-test and post-test were analyzed statistically.

The researcher did the observation in the first meeting. The observation was intended to know the real condition of teaching-learning process in the classroom. This process included students' activities in learning English and teacher's technique in teaching reading skill to the students. The researcher made an observation checklist as guidance during the process of observation. She found that the English teacher did not use schema activation strategy in teaching reading skill. When the researcher observed the students, it was found that they had difficulties in finding out the main idea of a paragraph or text. The students were lack of skill in comprehending the English text. During the teaching-learning process, only few students were active asking questions to their English teacher and rest of the class just kept silent.

After conducting the observation the researcher gave the pre-test to experimental and control groups. The aim of the test was to measure the students' ability in comprehending English text before applying the treatment.The researcher gave test consisting of 20 items; 10 true/false items and 10 essay items. The result of pre test of both groups can be seen in the following tables:

Table 2:
The Result of Pre-Test of Experimental Group

No	Students' Initial	Obtained Score	Maximum Score	Individual Score
1	AA	29	40	72.5
2	AL	28	40	70
3	AS	30	40	75
4	DI	28	40	70
5	DP	23	40	57.5
6	FA	22	40	55
7	FO	31	40	77.5
8	FR	27	40	67.5
9	FS	26	40	65
10	FI	30	40	75
11	GF	25	40	62.5
12	IN	26	40	65
13	IR	28	40	70
14	KD	36	40	90
15	KS	32	40	80
16	KH	21	40	52.5
17	MS	24	40	60
18	MJ	25	40	62.5
19	MC	33	40	82.5
20	MN	28	40	70
21	MR	23	40	57.5
22	NM	25	40	62.5
23	NS	30	40	75
24	NA	30	40	75
25	NU	28	40	70
26	PR	30	40	75
27	RA	31	40	77.5
28	RH	28	40	70
29	RC	25	40	57.5
30	RR	26	40	65
31	RP	22	40	55
32	SD	27	40	67.5
33	SA	33	40	82.5
34	SK	30	40	75
35	SN	33	40	82.5
36	YR	29	40	72.5
Highest Score			**36**	**90**
Lowest Score			**22**	**55**
Total Score				**2500**

To find out the mean score of the experimental group in pre-test, the writer applied the formula as stated in the previous chapter. The mean calculation is as follows:

$$\overline{X}_1 = \frac{\sum X_1}{n_1}$$
$$= \frac{2500}{36}$$
$$=69.4$$

The result of computation showed that none of students got maximum score. The highest score was 36 and the lowest score was 22. The mean score of experimental group in pre-test was 69.4. It indicates that the reading comprehension of students at SMA Negeri 4 Palu was quite low before getting the treatment.

Table 3:
The Result of Pre-Test of Control Group

No	Students' Initial	Obtained Score	Maximum Score	Individual Score
1	AH	30	40	75
2	AA	27	40	67.5
3	AT	28	40	70
4	AR	19	40	47.5
5	AF	22	40	55
6	FB	22	40	55
7	DI	28	40	70
8	FC	19	40	47.5
9	HA	26	40	65
10	HK	31	40	77.5
11	IW	30	40	75
12	MH	31	40	77.5
13	MM	31	40	77.5
14	MR	29	40	72.5
15	MF	31	40	77.5
16	MA	23	40	57.5
17	MN	30	40	75
18	MB	31	40	77.5
19	MD	31	40	77.5
20	MI	24	40	60
21	MU	28	40	70
22	RC	27	40	67.5
23	RR	26	40	65
24	RD	25	40	62.5
25	RM	22	40	55
26	SS	24	40	60
27	SW	29	40	72.5
28	SR	28	40	70
29	UN	21	40	52.5
30	WL	31	40	77.5
31	WA	24	40	60
32	YK	25	40	62.5
Highest Score			**31**	**77.5**
Lowest Score			**19**	**47.5**
Total Score				**2132.5**

After counting the mean score of experimental group, the researcher then computed the mean score of control group in pre-test. The result is as follows:

$$\overline{X}_2 = \frac{\sum X_2}{n_2}$$
$$= \frac{2132.5}{32}$$
$$= 66.64$$

After calculating the data, the result showed that the difference between mean score of experimental (69.4) and control group (66.64) was only 2.76. The slight difference indicated that the level of knowledge between the both groups in pre-test was nearly equal before conducting the treatment.

Then the researcher administered post-test after giving the treatment. The post-test hadthe same form as the pre-test. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 4:
The Result of Post-Test of Experimental Group

No	Students' Initial	Obtained Score	Maximum Score	Individual Score
1	AA	30	40	75
2	AL	31	40	77.5
3	AS	36	40	90
4	DI	34	40	85
5	DP	30	40	75
6	FA	28	40	70
7	FO	32	40	80
8	FR	37	40	92.5
9	FS	29	40	72.5
10	FI	36	40	90
11	GF	33	40	82.5
12	IN	30	40	75
13	IR	30	40	75
14	KD	28	40	70
15	KS	29	40	72.5
16	KH	27	40	67.5
17	MS	30	40	75
18	MJ	32	40	80
19	MC	31	40	77.5
20	MN	33	40	82.5
21	MR	26	40	65
22	NM	30	40	75
23	NS	33	40	82.5
24	NA	27	40	67.5
25	NU	29	40	72.5
26	PR	34	40	85
27	RA	33	40	82.5
28	RH	30	40	75
29	RC	31	40	72.5
30	RR	26	40	65
31	RP	30	40	75
32	SD	30	40	75
33	SA	30	40	75
34	SK	36	40	90
35	SN	34	40	85
36	YR	27	40	67.5
Highest Score			**37**	**92.5**
Lowest Score			**26**	**65**
Total Score				**2775**

The mean score of the experimental group in post-test was computed as follows:

$$\overline{X}_1 = \frac{\sum X_1}{n_1}$$

$$= \frac{2775}{36}$$

$$=77.08$$

The mean score in post-test of experimental group was 77.08. It means that there was a significant progress of mean score of experimental group from 69.4 in the pre-test to 77.08 in the post-test.

Table 5:
The Result of Post-Test of Control Group

No	Students' Initial	Obtained Score	Maximum Score	Individual Score
1	AH	32	40	80
2	AA	28	40	70
3	AT	26	40	65
4	AR	27	40	67.5
5	AR	24	40	60
6	FB	26	40	65
7	DI	24	40	60
8	FC	15	40	37.5
9	HA	24	40	60
10	HK	34	40	85
11	IW	32	40	80
12	MH	32	40	80
13	MM	30	40	75
14	MR	30	40	75
15	MF	31	40	77.5
16	MA	24	40	60
17	MN	24	40	60
18	MB	33	40	82.5
19	MD	30	40	75
20	MI	25	40	62.5
21	MU	30	40	75
22	RC	25	40	62.5
23	RR	29	40	72.5
24	RD	30	40	75
25	RM	24	40	60
26	SS	28	40	70
27	SW	26	40	65
28	SR	23	40	57.5
29	UN	29	40	72,5
30	WL	28	40	70
31	WA	29	40	72.5
32	YK	29	40	72.5
Highest Score			**33**	**82.5**
Lowest Score			**15**	**37.5**
Total Score				**2202.5**

After computing the mean score of the control group in post-test, the researcher counted the mean score of control group in post-test as follows:

$$\overline{X}_2 = \frac{\sum X_2}{n_2}$$

$$= \frac{2202.5}{32}$$

$$= 68.82$$

The mean score of control group in post-test was 66.64. It showed that the mean score of control group also increased from 66.64 in the pre-test to 68.82 in the post-test. After analyzing the data, the researcher found that the students' scores both in experimental and control groups increased. There was a significant progress of mean score of experimental group from 69.4 in the pre-test to 77.08 in the post-test. The mean score of control group also increased from 66.64 in the pre-test to 68.82 in the post-test. Although there was a progress of students' score of control group, but the difference between mean score of experimental and control group was quite significant. It was about 8.26 because the mean score of experimental group was 77.08 while the control group's score was only 68.82.

After getting the result of pre and post test of experimental and control group, the researcher then counted the students' deviation score of both groups by using the formula proposed by Gay (1996:528):

a. The mean score of deviation of experimental group

$$n_1 = 36 \longrightarrow \overline{X}_1 = \frac{\sum X_1}{n_1}$$
$$= \frac{290}{36}$$
$$= 8.056$$

b. The mean score of deviation of control group

$$n_2 = 32 \longrightarrow \overline{X}_2 = \frac{\sum X_2}{n_2}$$
$$= \frac{70}{32}$$
$$= 2.1875$$

Then theresearcher counted the sum of squared deviation around the means of experimental and control group as can be seen in the following ways.

a. The sum of squared deviation of the experimental group

$$SS_1 = \sum X_1^2 - \frac{(\sum X_1)^2}{n_1}$$
$$= 4731.25 - \frac{290^2}{36}$$
$$= 4731.25 - \frac{84100}{36}$$
$$= 4731.25 - 2336.11$$
$$= 2359.14$$

b. The sum of squared deviation of the control group

$$SS_2 = \sum X_2^2 - \frac{(\sum X_2)^2}{n_2}$$

$$= 2487.5 - \frac{70^2}{32}$$

$$= 2487.5 - \frac{4900}{32}$$

$$= 2487.5 - 153.125$$

$$= 2334.375$$

After computing the squared around the mean, the researcher computed the t-counted by using t-counted in order to know the significance difference between the experimental and control group. The writer used the formula proposed by Gay (1996:486) is as follow:

$$t = \frac{\overline{x_1} - \overline{x_2}}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{8.056 - 2.1875}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{2359.14 + 2334.375}{36+32-2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{36} + \frac{1}{32}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.8685}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{4729.515}{66}\right)\left(\frac{8}{288} + \frac{9}{288}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.8685}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{4729.515}{66}\right)\left(\frac{17}{288}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.8685}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{80401.755}{19088}\right)}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.8685}{\sqrt{4.23}}$$

$$t = \frac{5.8685}{2.0567}$$

$$t = 2.853$$

DISCUSSION

In relation to the result, the researcher would like to present discussion. The researcher found that there were differences between teaching reading skill with and without KWL chart as a schema activation strategy. When she did the preliminary observation, she found that the students had difficulties in understanding an English text; therefore they were not able to find the main ideas. Furthermore, they could not finish their task punctually because they spent much time to look for the meaning of unfamiliar words

in their dictionaries. It occurred because the students did the task without using any techniques or strategies. The result of post-test of experimental and control group showed that there was a significant difference between mean score of both groups. The mean score of experimental group (77.08) was higher than the mean score of control group (68.82). The difference of both scores was 8.26. This significant difference indicates that schema activation strategy is an effective way in teaching reading skill. It can be seen in the following evidences.

First, based on the result of post-test of experimental group, it is found that there were 30 students who got score higher than their score in the pre-test and there are only 6 students who were unsuccessful. The result of post-test of control group showed that there were only 21 students whose score improved and there were 11 students who get score lower than the score in pre-test. In addition, there were 4 students of experimental group whose score equal or greater than 90. The highest score was 92.5. There was none of control group students who got score equal or higher than 90 because the highest score was only 82.5. It happened because the researcher applied well KWL chart as a schema activation strategy during eight meetings to the experimental group by following all the aspects in lesson plan.

Second, the researcher found that some factors also have contributed well to the success of the post-test of experimental group. They are as follows:

a. The researcher explained well the technique to the students including the step by steps procedure of KWL chart, how to find the main topic and main idea of the text, and how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words contextually.
b. The researcher implemented KWL chart systematically. Before distributing the texts to the students, she introduced and explained what schema activation strategy and KWL chart were. After having the texts, the students were assigned to identify the topic of the text. Then the researcher asked them to work with their KWL charts. A KWL Chart could help students organize their thoughts before they began reading. As students were activating their prior knowledge and making connections, they use KWL chart to map their thinking. It is in line with what Ogle (1986) states that KWL strategy works to scaffold readers' prior knowledge to new knowledge, while encouraging student engagement in their own learning. As the result, they could enlarge their reading comprehension. The researcher actively controlled and guided the students during the application of KWL chart.

c. The researcher restricted the use of dictionary. She gave the students time limitation for each task and evaluation. It was important to accustom the students to work punctually. If they were allowed to always consult with their dictionaries, they would spend much time working on their dictionaries. The researcher asked the students to try to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words contextually. They were assigned to understand the text sentence by sentences rather than word by words.
d. The level of reading text given by the researcher was in harmony with the level of reading comprehension the students had. Harmer (2007) explains that the success of reading activity will often depend on the level of text that the students are going to work with.

Finally, based on the research findings, the researcher believed that the implementation of schema activation strategy had given big contribution to the improvement of students' reading comprehension. Therefore the pre-reading activities, such as KWL chart, which can assist students to activate their schemata, should not be ignored by the English teacher at school.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Referring to the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Schema Activation Strategy is effective to improve reading comprehension of the first grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Palu. It is proven by the result of t-counted (2.853) which is greater than t-table (1.998). In addition, the mean score of experimental group improved from 69.4 to 77.08 after getting the treatment. This result was obtained after the researcher implemented the procedures of KWL chart as a strategy to activate students' schemata. The procedures are presented in the following steps; (1) introducing the strategy, (2) grouping the students, (3) distributing the reading materials, (4) asking the students to predict the topic of the text from the title given, (5) directing students to make KWL chart in their papers, (6) guiding the students in answering the questions of the text, (6) making conclusion. When asking students to make KWL charts, the researcher guided them in order to ensure that they already understood what should be done in the chart. Furthermore, the Schema Activation Strategy has encouraged the first grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Palu to actively participate during the teaching and learning process of reading.

Based on the conclusion, the researcher would like to give some suggestions for the English teachers and the students. Firstly, it is suggested for the English teachers to apply this strategy in teaching reading skill because this strategy can help the students to be

familiar with the text they are going to read. Secondly, the English teachers should not neglect the pre reading activities which can attract students' motivation in learning English. Lastly, it is suggested for the students to try to use this strategy before reading an English text. It can help them in improving their reading comprehension.

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